

LOST CHANNEL

UTM Ref. 17TPV048727

Wood Township, Muskoka Lakes
Status: Recommend Heritage Area

Area: 905 ha

Site Characteristics

The Lost Channel area is a major complex of wetlands and thin-soiled uplands roughly bounded by the Severn River, Pretty Channel, and Lost Channel. Much of the central area is relatively flat, with a thin discontinuous drift of glacial tills over gneissic bedrock ridges. Well-defined bedrock valleys occur along Pretty Channel and the central and western portions of Lost Channel.

The area is drained by small creeks, much affected by beaver activity. Original flow levels along the main channels have been significantly altered by water control of the Trent-Severn Waterway for navigation and hydro-electric generation. The amount of water now flowing through Lost Channel is minimal, probably a fraction of what it once was.

While open rock barren communities are found in some sections, especially along Pretty Channel, much of the uplands in this site support mixed and coniferous forests. Mixed stands of White Pine, Red Oak, and Red Maple give way to Large-tooth Aspen, White Birch, and White Pine on earlier successional sites, and to late successional Maple-Beech-Eastern Hemlock forests on deeper soils. Coniferous forests include White and Red Pine on dry sites, Eastern Hemlock on mesic, north-facing slopes, and Balsam Fir on moister soils.

A wide range of wetland communities occur within this area, including recent beaver ponds, older ponds with abundant floating-leaved and submergent aquatic vegetation, extensive poor fens of several types, including shrub, and herbaceous and treed beaver meadows, and wet deciduous swamp forest with Red Maple and some Black Ash.

Flora and Fauna

Total numbers of species recorded were:

Vascular Plants	462 native; 40 introduced; 7 A.C.P.F with a score of 33 (Moderate)
Birds	58 observed during breeding season
Mammals	5
Herpetofauna	18
Butterflies	9

Significant Natural Values and Selection Criteria Met

1. **Landform Feature** - (A1) A steep, sheer-walled gorge approximately 10 metres deep is found along the narrow section of Lost Channel in the northern portion of the site. This gorge is considered an uncommon landform feature in Muskoka.

2. **Representation** - (B1) The area includes two communities not well represented elsewhere in Muskoka. A graminoid poor fen community (normal/organic/very wet), characterized by the presence of the sedges *Carex magellancia* and *Carex limosa*, occurs as one of the wetland communities. A cool, wet-mesic forest dominated by Balsam Fir (cooler/sand/wet-mesic) is especially unusual in this part of Muskoka, and is poorly represented elsewhere in the District.

3. **Diversity** - (B2) The number of native vascular plant species found in the Lost Channel area is well above the expected for Muskoka, as shown in Figure 1. This plant diversity is exceeded in Muskoka only by one other, much larger Heritage Area. It is also exceeded in nearby Big Chute ANSI (largely in Simcoe County), which has been much more extensively studied. The Lost Channel area also shows a good diversity of herptile species, with eleven amphibians and seven reptiles documented.

4. **Quality and Disturbance** - (B3) The interior of the Lost Channel area is well-buffered from disturbance, and provides high-quality examples of many of the ecological communities typical of southern Muskoka.

5. **Rare Species** - (B4) The Lost Channel area provides habitat for the following rare species:

Wildlife

- Necturus maculosus* Mudpuppy [RR]
Heterodon platirhinos Eastern Hognose Snake [PR]
Sistrurus c. catenatus Eastern Massasauga [NR PR]

Vascular Plants

- Allium canadense* Wild Garlic [RR]
Arabis laevigata Smooth Rock Cress [RR]
Asplenium trichomanes Maidenhair Spleenwort [RR]
Bidens discoidea Small Beggar-Ticks [NR PR]
Bromus kalmii Kalm's Chess Brome [RR]
Carex backii Sedge [RR]
Carex comosa Bristly Sedge [RR]
Desmodium canadense Showy Tick Trefoil [RR]
Elymus riparius River-bank Rye [RR]
Hypericum punctatum Spotted St. John's Wort [RR]
Isoetes Xeatonii Eaton's Quillwort [NR PR RR]
Myriophyllum heterophyllum Various-leaved Water Mil-foil [RR]
Platanthera blephariglottis White Fringed Orchis [PR]
Platanthera psycodes Smaller Purple Fringed Orchis [RR]
Potamogeton perfoliatus Pondweed [RR]
Pycnanthemum virginianum Virginia Mountain Mint [RR]
Salix serissima Autumn Willow [RR]
Sanicula marilandica Black Snakeroot [RR]
Sisyrinchium mucronatum Slender Blue-eyed Grass [RR]
Solidago ptarmicoides Upland White Aster [RR]
Sphenopholis intermedia Slender Wedge Grass [RR]

Triadenum virginicum Marsh St. John's Wort [PR]
Xyris difformis Slender Yellow-eyed Grass [PR]

In addition, regionally uncommon species found within the area include 46 vascular plants, two birds, and three herptiles.

6. Size and Linkage - (B6) The Lost Channel area provides a relatively large natural complex, particularly in the context of the Severn River corridor. Its shape and geographic location make it largely self-buffering from edge effects, thereby providing habitat conditions for species requiring interior conditions.

7. Biogeographic Significance - (B7) One species of particular biogeographic interest is Eaton's Quillwort, which is known in Canada only in the vicinity of Big Chute (Varga, 1988). This aquatic species occurs in Pretty Channel and in a bay along the Severn River, and was also found in the lower section of Lost Channel.

8. Scenic Landscapes - (C7) Parts of this area touch upon the Severn River, which has been identified as a corridor of high scenic value. As well, Pretty Channel has been identified as an area of exceptional scenic attractiveness, related to its natural shorelines and fast waters.

Ownership and Disturbance

The Lost Channel area is approximately 90% Crown land, with cottages along the Severn River and upper Lost Channel sections of the shoreline just outside the Heritage Area boundary. The area was cut over in the past century, but has regenerated into fairly mature forest since then. Several snowmobile trails cross the area, and boat traffic is heavy in the adjacent waterways. However, the vast majority of this large area is intact and undisturbed.

Sensitivity

Since one of the values of the Lost Channel area is its size and intactness, its value would be diminished by the intrusion of roads, utility corridors, or other developments in the interior. Most of the forested area is located on thin, nutrient-poor soils, making it sensitive to excessive disturbance through logging. The rare aquatic plants associated with this site could be affected by physical impacts such as dock construction, or alteration of water levels. Finally, the scenic values of the area, most notably along Pretty Channel, are vulnerable to excessive or badly designed development.

Major Sources of Information

Kamstra, 1992; Bajc and Paterson, 1992 b; Berney and Reid, 1993; MacDonald, 1986; Varga, 1988.